

Dragoș MÎRȘANU

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgia)

FURTHER NOTES ON THE AESTHETIC 'SHADOW' OF GOTHIC ARIANISM IN RAVENNA

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Abstract

This paper is a follow-up to my earlier study "The Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism: Archaeology, Architecture and Art in the Age of Heresies", in which I investigated the material evidence for the dispute between the Arian Ostrogoths and the Nicene Orthodox Romans in the Late Antique West. Now I will further explore the topic by analyzing several pieces of iconography from Ravenna not taken previously into consideration and providing additional arguments for the existence of an Arian/anti-Arian message behind the religious art of Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy.

Earlier this year I was happy to contribute a research paper on the iconography of the Arianism of Barbarians in Late Antiquity to a volume honouring Professor Andrei Pleșu¹. While giving there the main part of what I believe should be said on the subject, I will take the opportunity to submit here a brief addition to my initial analysis. This return has been motivated by the completion, this past summer, of a study trip to Ravenna. It offered me a chance to have a look first hand at the relevant mosaics and to learn of some Italian titles that were unknown to me when writing my first piece². Now it is hoped that the present paper, read as a supplement to my main study, will make available a more complete picture of the evidence for the Arian and anti-Arian messages behind the

¹ Dragoș MÎRȘANU, "The Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism: Archaeology, Architecture and Art in the Age of Heresies", in: Mihail NEAMȚU, Bogdan TĂTARU-CAZABAN (eds.), *Memory, Humanity, and Meaning. Selected Essays in Honor of Andrei Pleșu's Sixtieth Anniversary Offered by New Europe College Alumni & Friends*, Zeta Books, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 397-418.

² Among these publications, it was Claudio MONTANARI's *Ravenna: l'iconologia. Saggi di interpretazione culturale e religiosa dei cicli musivi*, Longo Editore, Ravenna, 2002, in particular that has prompted my paper.

iconographical representations in the Ostrogothic and Byzantine Ravenna.

A Brief Review of My Primary Research

I shall first present here an abstract of my previous study. Converted during the late fourth and fifth centuries to a form of late, 'Gothic', Arianism, most of the migratory 'barbarian' peoples that settled in the empire relentlessly maintained their religious distinctiveness from the Orthodox Christian *Romanitas*. My article investigated the arguments supporting the existence of an artistic mirroring of this 'clash' by exploring the material evidence (iconographic, architectural, etc.) from Visigothic Gaul and Spain and especially from Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy. One of the main questions was whether there were any specifically Arian or anti-Arian (Orthodox/Catholic) messages behind the iconography of the sixth-century churches in Ravenna. I concluded that the surviving material evidence could not support the firm conclusion that art was employed to reflect on, and polemically affirm, the subtle differences between the Arian and Nicene theologies.

My initial survey of the Ravenna monuments included:

- the two baptisteries, Orthodox and Arian (the mosaics on the domes);
- the basilica of S. Vitale (the Mambre scene, the solar monogram on the triumphal arch, the Christ *Kosmokrator*);
- the basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo (the enthroned Christ and *Theotokos*, the curtains that were used to replace depictions of Ostrogothic dignitaries, the group of martyrs headed by St Martin);
- the Orthodox Archiepiscopal Chapel (the Christ dressed in a cloak);
- the basilica of S. Michele in Africisco (the mosaic with the triumphant Christ)³.

³ For the monuments in Ravenna I refer chiefly to the magisterial works of Friedrich Wilhelm DEICHMANN: *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (= *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, vol. 3), Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1958; *Ravenna: Geschichte und Monumente* (= *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, vol. 1), Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1969; *Kommentar* (= *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, vol. 2), in 3 parts, Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1974–1986.

New Considerations

My recent visit to Ravenna gave me the opportunity to notice some elements that I previously missed or considered irrelevant. In the main, I shall now examine the *medallion with a jewelled cross* from S. Apollinare in Classe, the *Last Supper with two fish and bread* from S. Apollinare Nuovo and the presence of the motif of the *Three Magi* in both S. Vitale and S. Apollinare Nuovo.

The medallion with crux gemmata in S. Apollinare in Classe

Consecrated in AD 549 by Bishop Maximian, the basilica of Classis near Ravenna was dedicated to S. Apollinaris. A scene representing the holy bishop and martyr dominates the mosaic in the lower part of the apse

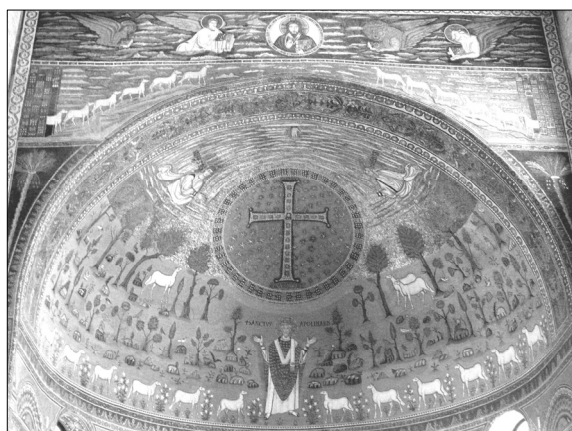


Fig. 1. S. Apollinare in Classe: *View of the apse*

(fig. 1). S. Apollinaris is depicted against a paradisiacal scenery with evergreen and other sorts of trees, with birds and a flock of twelve lambs – symbolising generally the Apostles and here also the faithful entrusted to the bishop's care. The upper part of the mosaic contains a medallion with a large, golden *crux gemmata* that bears Christ's face in the middle, set on a starry sky background. The cross is flanked by an *A* (on the left) and an *Ω* (on the right) and has two inscriptions, one above (IXΘΥΣ) and one below (SALVS MVNDI). Set on the firmament, endorsed from above by the Hand of God and flanked by the busts of Moses and Elias, the medallion is also being looked at from below by three lambs.

This very particular representation of the Transfiguration of the Lord (cf. Mat. 17:1-5, where the three lambs that witness from below correspond to Peter, James and John) is a very complex one⁴. The setting is neither simply Mount Tabor, nor Golgotha. As it is, the cross is set in

⁴ See F.W. DEICHMANN, *Ravenna Hauptstadt...*, 1, pp. 261-276.

heaven, which means that the mosaic connects the theophany on the Tabor, the Passion on the Cross and the Second Coming of Christ. We are being communicated a message of salvation by cross, a fact made explicit by means of the ΑΩ, ΙΧΘΥΣ and SALVS MVNDI inscriptions (referring to the quality of Saviour of the world for the One who is the Beginning and the End). Also, above the apse, the twelve lambs are replicated in an eschatological key. It is appropriate to include here, following Deichmann's example, S. John Chrysostom's words on the connection between the Transfiguration on Tabor and the Second Coming and the Last Judgement of Christ:

"Nothing then is more blessed than the apostles, and especially the three, who even in the cloud were counted worthy to be under the same roof with the Lord. But if we will, we also shall behold Christ, not as they then on the mount, but in far greater brightness. For not thus shall He come hereafter. For whereas then, to spare His disciples, He discovered so much only of His brightness as they were able to bear; hereafter He shall come in the very glory of the Father, not with Moses and Elias only, but with the infinite host of the angels, with the archangels, with the cherubim, with those infinite tribes, not having a cloud over His head, but even heaven itself being folded up"⁵.

Jesus Christ of the mosaic in question may appear to the informed observer as the eternal (ΑΩ) Son of the Father (the Hand from above), the Saviour of the world (ΙΧΘΥΣ, SALVS MVNDI). From this perspective, of emphasizing the soteriological aspect of the mission of the Son of God (in the sense given by S. Athanasius the Great), I would argue that it is plausible that this iconography was also meant to deliver an anti-Arian message⁶.

⁵ JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, *In Matthaemum*, 56.7, PG 58, 551. Translated by George Prevost and revised by M.B. Riddle: S. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Matthew*, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 10, edited by Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY, 1888. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200156.htm> (accessed 01-03-2010).

⁶ The suggestion can be found in F.W. DEICHMANN, *Ravenna Hauptstadt...*, 1, pp. 266-267 and is strongly advocated by C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, pp. 129, 197-198. On Arian Soteriology see R.C. GREGG, D.E. GROH, *Early Arianism – A View of Salvation*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981.

Last Supper with two fish and bread

My second station is the basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo, several mosaics of which I discussed in my primary paper⁷. As far as the Christological panels in the nave are concerned, I argued that it is unlikely that the biblical passages illustrated reflect an Arian iconographic programme⁸.



Fig. 2. S. Apollinare Nuovo: *The Last Supper with two fish and bread* *apse*

However, in the superior register of the right wall of the nave, one can notice a mosaic depicting Christ and the Twelve Disciples ready to dine with loaves of bread and two large fish (but no wine) (**fig. 2**). They are seated as around a Roman *triclinium*. Christ, on the left, has an attitude of blessing, while Judas is probably the one seating on the far right. It has been suggested that the presence of the two fish, although intriguing (as it is), should not hinder us from recognizing that this is still

a depiction of the Last Supper (*Mt.* 26:26-29; *Mk.* 14:22-25; *Lk.* 22:19-20; *Jn.* 13:21-26; *1 Cor.* 11:23-26)⁹. We shall proceed to see how is that possible by means of eliminating first the unlikely reference to the

⁷ D. MİRŞANU, "The Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism...", pp. 420-422. The basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo conserves mosaics from both the Arian, and the later Orthodox, phases. For a general monograph, see Emanuela PENNI IACCO, *La basilica di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna attraversa i secoli*, Ante Quem, Bologna, 2004.

⁸ See e.g. Emanuela PENNI IACCO, "Gli Ariani a Ravenna: le scene cristologiche della basilica di S. Apollinare Nuovo", in: *Ocnus*, XII (2004), pp. 199-214. Generally, the proponents of such views point out that the absence of important episodes, such as the Birth or Baptism of Christ, is conspicuous and meant to reflect the lesser Arian understanding of the Incarnation, while an icon such as that of the Raising of Lazarus would have been important for the implied subordination of the Christ to God the Father (*Jn* 11: 41-42).

⁹ Bellarmino BAGATTI, "Il significato della cena nel mosaic di S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna", in: *Felix Ravenna*, IV (1980), 1-2, pp. 89-94.

acrostic IXΘΥΣ – why the presence of two fish in such a case¹⁰ – to a celestial banquet – since we are nowhere told there will be fish on such occasion, only wine drinking (cf. e.g. *Mt.* 26:29) – or to a funeral banquet (*refrigerium*)¹¹. Instead, the supporters of the Last Supper hypothesis would insist that the mosaic should not be understood symbolically, but as a depiction of the real Last Supper. But how could be that, as the Synoptics and Apostle Paul do not mention that Jesus and his disciples had fish on that occasion?

In fact, as Bellarmino Bagatti argues, the scene is likely a depiction of a distinctive liturgical practice of the Gothic Arians, who might have continued the observance of an agape equivalent to the formal supper of the Jewish *Cena pura*, as they believed that the Last Supper was actually such a religious meal.

First, let us see how this can be connected to the Jewish *Cena pura*¹². This hypothesis is evidently based on one of the opinions held in the long-standing debate involving biblical scholars and historians of the Early Church regarding the character of the Last Supper. Giving preference to the Johannine chronology against that of the Synoptic Evangelists, scholars such as Hans Lietzmann and Gregory Dix maintained that our Lord and the disciples formed a group of friends, *chabûrah*, which met regularly for a festal supper, generally held on the eve of Sabbaths or holy days¹³. According to this view, the Last Supper seems to have been such an evening meal, taking place twenty-four hours before the Passover, and not the Passover supper itself (at which lamb is customarily served).

¹⁰ For the fish associated with the Messiah in Judaism ('the food of the messianic Age') and Christ as the mystic fish, see Erwin R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 5, *Fish, Bread and Wine* (the first of two volumes), Pantheon Books, pp. 35-41, 50-53. One famous representation of the Eucharistic Fish is that of the Catacomb of S. Callisto (Crypt of Lucina) in Rome: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eucharistic_bread_and_fish.jpg.

¹¹ B. BAGATTI, "Il significato della cena...", pp. 89-90. For the funeral banquets with fish, see Cyrille VOGEL, "Le repas sacré au poisson chez les Chrétiens", in: *Revue des sciences religieuses*, XL (1966), 1, pp. 1-26, here pp. 24-26.

¹² For a discussion on the term *Cena pura* see Frederic MANNS, *Essays sur le Judeo-Christianisme*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 153-161.

¹³ See Hans LIETZMANN, *Mass and the Lord's Supper. A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, trans. Dorothea H.G. Reeve, with introduction and further inquiry by Robert Douglas Richardson, Brill, Leiden, 1979, p. 204 and Gregory DIX, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, The Seabury Press, New York, p. 50 *et seq.*

Looking back to the mosaic of Appolinare Nuovo, one could probably read it as part of the tradition of Paleochristian representations of the agape with fish that can be seen depicted in the Roman catacombs of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, of Priscilla and of S. Callisto, or on the Roman sarcophagus now in Museo Lateranense¹⁴. The Jewish meal with the messianic fish would have been thus assumed in Christianity via the Judeo-Christians, who applied the symbol to Christ and had fish with dinner as it was considered food for the soul¹⁵. Inserting our mosaic in the line of this tradition does not mean we can easily agree with the *Cena pura* hypothesis.

However, as the *Cena pura* is at least acceptable as a way to interpret our mosaic, let us see how can it be connected to the Gothic Arianism. Reading the decisions of some of the Catholic councils in the 'Visigothic' areas of Gaul (Agde, AD 506, canon 12, reiterated at Orleans IV, AD 541) and of Spain (Toledo IV, AD 633), Bagatti remarks the Catholics' rejection of the Gothic habit of breaking the Great Lent on Friday evenings (for Sabbath) with a festal banquet¹⁶. In the eye of an Orthodox such as S. Isidore of Seville, this went against the abstention required by the commemoration of the Passion and, by the non-paschal character of it, gave a wrong twist to the true meaning of the communion with the Body and Blood of Christ¹⁷. With this background in mind, Bagatti conjectures that the Arians could have had the practice of eating fish on the Sabbath, at an agape similar to the *Cena pura*, which we

¹⁴ As does F. MANNS, see *Essays sur le Judeo-Christianisme*, p. 156. For illustrations, see André GRABAR, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200-395*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967 (SS. Pietro e Marcellino: p. 112, fig. 111; S. Priscilla (*Fractio panis*): p. 112, fig. 110, S. Callisto (Chapel of the Sacraments): p. 107, fig. 105, and Mario RIGHETTI, *La messa. Manuale di Storia Liturgica*, 3, Editrice Ancora, Milan, ³1966 (for the Eucharistic scene with reader on the sarcophagus: p. 23).

¹⁵ For the fish in the inscriptions of Aberkios and Pectorios, see C. VOGEL, "Le repas sacré au poisson...", pp. 11-13.

¹⁶ B. BAGATTI, "Il significato della cena...", p. 93.

¹⁷ *PL* 84, 369: "Quidam in die ejusdem dominicae passionis ab hora nona jejunium solvunt, conviviis abutuntur, et dum sol ipse eadem die tenebris palleatus lumen subduxerit, ipsaque elementa turbata moestitiam totius mundi ostenderint, illi jejunium tanti diei polluant, epulisque inserviunt: et quia totum eundem diem universalis Ecclesia propter passionem Domini in moerore et abstinentia peragit, quicumque in eo jejunium praeter parvulos, senes et languidos, ante peractas indulgentiae preces resolverit, a paschali gaudio depelletur [*Ae., E. 4, repellatur*], nec in eo sacramentum corporis et sanguinis Domini percipiat, quia diem passionis ipsius per abstinentiam non honorat".

know that involved eating fish on Fridays at sunset¹⁸. To strengthen the less than clear connection between Arians and Jews, he points to the Ebionites – a sect of ascetic early Judeo-Christians or Gnostics who did not generally confess the divinity of Jesus Christ – who had, according to a fuming paragraph in S. Epiphanius of Salamis, the improper habit of eating the Passover without meat:

“But the Lord himself says in turn, “With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you” [Luke 22:15]. And he said, “this Passover”, not simply “Passover”, so that no one would practice it in accordance with his own notion. Passover, as I said, was roast meat and the rest. But of their own will these people [the Ebionites] have lost sight of the consequence of the truth, and have altered the wording... “Have I desired meat with desire, to eat this Passover with you?” But how can their tampering go undetected, when the consequence cries out that the “mu” and “eta” are additions?... Christ actually said, “With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you”. But they misled themselves by writing in meat and making a false entry... But it is plainly demonstrated that he both kept the Passover, and, as I said, ate meat”¹⁹.

It would appear possible, thus, that the Goths were heirs to an Arian tradition that preserved a Christian type of *Cena pura* from Judaism through Judeo-Christians such as the ascetic Ebionites. Consequently, the mosaic in question would reflect a typical Arian understanding of the Last Supper as the supper on the day before the Passover. While this is highly speculative, it has a certain appeal when considering the iconographic evidence against the broader background of the history of the church²⁰.

¹⁸ Eric G. FREUDENSTEIN, “Sabbath Fish”, in: *Judaica*, XXIX (1980), pp. 418-431.

¹⁹ EPIPHANIUS, *Panarion* (= *Adversus haereses*), 30.22.3-5, ed. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Bände 1-3: Ancoratus und Panarion*, coll. *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* 25, 31, 37. Hinrichs, Leipzig, 1: 1915; 2: 1922; 3: 1933. The English translation is from *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1-46)*, trans. Frank Williams, Brill, Leiden, 1987, pp. 137-138. Apparently, S. Epiphanius is convinced himself that the Last Supper was the evening meal on the Passover, but this is of no particular relevance for us here.

²⁰ Of the same opinion is C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, p. 131. To add another, theological, interpretation: the mosaic, as all the other aforementioned representations from the catacombs in Rome, could be also taken to symbolically connect the Eucharist of the Church with the miracle of the Feeding the multitude (cf. *Jn* 6: 1-59 with *Jn* 21: 9-13 against the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, as told by the Synoptic

The theme of the Three Magi and other plausible (and less plausible) particulars

Describing the two large bands of mosaic in the nave of S. Apollinare Nuovo – one with holy martyrs presenting their crowns to the enthroned Christ and the other with holy virgins moving towards the



Fig. 3. S. Apollinare Nuovo: *The Three Magi*

enthroned *Theotokos* – the ninth-century chronicler Agnellus of Ravenna makes the following comment on the presence of the Three Magi leading the second band:

“Why did not four, not six, or not two, but only these three came from the east? So that they might entirely signify the perfect plenitude of the Trinity”²¹. Admittedly, as S. Martin of Tours was chosen to

lead the martyrs towards Christ because of his reputation for opposing Arianism²², it is conceivable that the Three Magi could have been expected to perform a similar role for the row of virgins, i.e. to proclaim the Nicene teaching about the Holy Trinity (**fig. 3**). This understanding is

Evangelists and by S. Paul; an association found also in the patristic texts), as it was suggested for the *Fractio panis* scene in the Catacomb of S. Priscilla (see Herbert THURSTON, in: *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1913) s. v. *Fractio Panis*: [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Fractio_Panis](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Fractio_Panis) (accessed 01-03-2010). That would at least help explain the meaning of the number of fish on the table (two), which otherwise would be difficult to grasp. On the other hand, S. Apollinare Nuovo actually has a confirmed representation of the Feeding of the Multitude in the superior register of the left wall, on which see F.W. DEICHMANN, *Ravenna Hauptstadt...*, vol. 2.1, pp. 162-163.

²¹ AGNELLUS RAVENNATIS, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, 89, ed. O. Holder-Egger, coll. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et italicarum Saec. VI–IX*, Hannoverae, 1878: “Quare non quatuor, aut non sex, aut non duo, nisi tantum tres ab oriente venerunt? Ut significarent totius Trinitatis perfectam plenitudinem”. The English translation is from Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, coll. *Medieval Texts in Translation*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2004, p. 202.

²² For my initial comments, see D. MÎRȘANU, “The Aesthetic ‘Shadow’ of Gothic Arianism...”, pp. 420-422.

favoured by Claudio Montanari²³, who also wants to see a similar message behind the depiction of the Three Magi on Empress Theodora's robe in the mosaic of S. Vitale (**fig. 4**)²⁴. In addition to an anti-Arian message, the Italian scholar believes that Bishop Maximianus intended it also as an anti-Monophysite message, as the adoration of the Magi could remind of the human nature of Jesus Christ (against the opponents of Chalcedon, who were allegedly favoured by Theodora)²⁵.

In my opinion, this is an over-interpretation. It is true one can even strengthen the possibility of an anti-Monophysite message behind the mosaic of Apollinare Nuovo by noticing that the first of the virgins is S. Euphemia (famously related to the Council of Chalcedon of AD 451)²⁶. However, it is easier to see how in both instances the earthly rulers of the world considered themselves new Magi, offering, that is, their own gifts to Christ, as, for instance, André Grabar believed:

"We see the Emperor and Theodora bringing their offering of bullion, with due pomp and ceremony, to a sanctuary of Christ, their heavenly Lord, in exactly the same manner as the saints and martyrs in Sant'Apollinare proffered their golden



Fig. 4. S. Vitale: *Theodora and her retinue (with the Three Magi on Theodora's robe)*

²³ C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, p. 195.

²⁴ Deichmann does not concern himself with this detail in his extensive commentary of the two famous mosaics depicting Justinian and his retinue and Theodora and her retinue, respectively (F.W. DEICHMANN, *Ravenna Hauptstadt...*, 2.2, pp. 180-187).

²⁵ C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, pl. XVI (cf. also p. 196): "I magi nel manti di Teodora in S. Vitale, tre lustri prima che l'arcivescovo Agnello li facesse ritrarre nella Basilica Palatina teodoreciana, esprimono la fede trinitaria ortodossa: adorazione del Cristo vero uomo e vero Dio, anche contro il presunto monofisismo di Teodora".

²⁶ I refer here to the miracle by her relics determining the decision of the Council (*Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae: Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, ed. Hippolyte Delahaye, Brussels, 1902, pp. 811-813). On the Council in general see now *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, 3 vols., coll. *Translated Texts for Historians* 45, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2005.

crowns to Christ and the Virgin. Perhaps the influence of the other mosaic explains the re-appearance here of the theme of the Magi (embroidered on Theodora's robe). The Byzantine monarchs were the "new Magi", that is to say princes on whom, *ex officio*, devolved the duty that the Kings of the East were bidden to perform on one memorable occasion at the dawn of the Age of Grace. It behoved them, too, to bring their gifts to the Church, and to perform ever and again an act of recognition of their Supreme Master and, by the same token, of their own status as mandataries"²⁷.

This latter explanation is clearly more telling in my opinion, but will not exclude the explanation suggesting anti-Arian and anti-Monophysite intentions: they could be both parts of a complex meaning.

Considering further Claudio Montanari's work, one can notice his conviction that quite a few other elements of the iconography of the monuments of Ravenna testify to an anti-Arian stance. Among these are



Fig. 5. S. Apollinare Nuovo: *The solar monogram above the apse*

the Mambre scene and especially the solar ΑΩ monogram in San Vitale, analyzed by me in my previous study (fig. 5)²⁸.

While the Mambre scene seems to have, in context, primarily a sacrificial meaning, I admitted the possibility that the monogram was intended to proclaim the triumph over Arianism, but I considered that the question has to

remain open. Furthermore, Montanari's belief that the monogram on Bishop Maximianus' sarcophagus is an affirmation of the latter's Nicene faith is but another example of over-interpretation, as the presence of

²⁷ André GRABAR, *Byzantine Painting*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, Editions Albert Skira, Geneva, 1953, p. 68.

²⁸ C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, pp. 195-197 and figs. 22-23 with explanations (pl. XV). For my discussion see D. MÎRȘANU, "The Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism...", p. 418.

christograms flanked by ΑΩ in Early Christian art is widespread and cannot be firmly connected with an anti-Arian message²⁹.

Apart from their iconography, the Orthodox rededication of Arian churches can also be considered illustrative of the manner in which a message of reconciliation was conveyed. Among the suggestions made by Montanari, I consider the rededication of the Arian basilica *Anastasis Gothorum* as the Basilica of the Holy Spirit to be the most acceptable³⁰. Montanari mentions also a rather too imaginative suggestion by Allesandro Testi-Rasponi, who wanted to see in the dedication of no less than two churches to S. George the Martyr an answer to the Arians' veneration of George of Alexandria, a fierce adversary of S. Athanasius the Great³¹. Indeed, it is known that one can find in the same city competing churches dedicated to saints with the same name but different affiliations³². Nevertheless, as the veneration of the Arian bishop by the Goths is only conjectural, I find Testi-Rasponi's hypothesis rather far-fetched.

Conclusion

In the closing words of my previous paper, I suggested that it cannot be denied the fact that several of the iconographic scenes, when associated with specific scriptural texts, do transpire a message favouring, perhaps, a certain understanding of the divinity of the Son. Following an examination of three other possible pieces of evidence from Ravenna, my initial conclusion is reconfirmed. First, I believe that the medallion with *crux gemmata* in S. Apollinare in Classe, adorned with theological inscriptions as it is, can be positively included among the elements that show the victory of the imperial, Nicene Orthodoxy against the Gothic Arianism. The intriguing *Last Supper* with two fish and bread from S. Apollinare Nuovo (the 'Arian' phase) can be read, with a bit of caution, as

²⁹ C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, fig. 24, with explanation (pl. XVI). For my opinion see D. MIRSANU, "The Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism...", p. 425.

³⁰ C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, p. 195.

³¹ Alessandro TESTI RASPONI, *Codex Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, II, in: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Bologna, 1924, pp. 221-222 [n.v.] quoted by C. MONTANARI, *Ravenna: l'iconologia...*, p. 195.

³² For example, even today, in Romania, there are Orthodox churches that have been dedicated to S. Anthony the Great (3rd-4th c.) – or at least in which the veneration of this Eastern saint is overly emphasized – in part in order to counter the presence in the same area of a Roman-Catholic church dedicated to S. Anthony of Padua (13th c.).

a reflection of a peculiar religious/liturgical practice of the Gothic Arians. As for the theme of the *Three Magi* in the mosaics of S. Apollinare Nuovo (the 'Orthodox' phase) and S. Vitale, I think they were more likely intended to bestow the status of New Magi on Justinian and Theodora rather than deliver a triumphal anti-Arian or anti-Monophysite message, although the latter interpretation cannot be dismissed.³³

Rezumat: Din nou despre „haina” estetică a arianismului goților în Ravenna

Studiul de față oferă considerații noi în marginea unei cercetări recente, intitulată – în traducere – „Despre «haina» estetică a arianismului: arheologie, arhitectură și artă în epoca ereziilor”, pe care am publicat-o în paginile unui *Festschrift Andrei Pleșu* (Zeta Books, 2009). Aceasta era o investigație asupra posibilei reflecții în artă a disputei teologice între barbarii arieni și romanii ortodocși din Galia, Hispania sau Italia, în perioada Antichității târzii (sec. V-VI). Spre exemplu, analizând datele obținute din studiul iconografiei bisericilor din Ravenna sec. al VI-lea și ferindu-mă de pericolul supraevaluării unor mărturii excepționale, conchideam că nu se poate afirma cu certitudine că arta a fost instrumentată astfel încât să ilustreze și să afirme polemic diferențele specifice doctrinelor arianismului, respectiv creștinismului nicean (împotriva arianismului).

Citit în continuarea rezultatelor cercetării principale, textul de față oferă note suplimentare asupra unor elemente iconografice neluate inițial în considerare, dar pe care am decis să le evaluez aici ca urmare a unei recente călătorii de studiu la Ravenna. Astfel, sunt discutate, în principal, medalionul cu *crux gemmata* din absida bazilicii S. Apollinare in Classe, mozaicul reprezentând Cina cea de Taină cu doi pești și pâini din S. Apollinare Nuovo și tema celor Trei Magi, așa cum e reprezentată în S. Vitale și S. Apollinare Nuvo.

Examinarea atentă, împreună cu necesara contextualizare istorică, conduc la reafirmarea concluziei de bază a cercetării mele: unele dintre scenele iconografice, cel puțin atunci când sunt însoțite de anumite inscripții scripturistice, transmit un mesaj ce poate sugera o anume înțelegere privind divinitatea Fiului lui Dumnezeu. Împodobit cu astfel de inscripții, medalionul cu marea *crux gemmata* din S. Apollinare in Classe (iconografie ortodoxă), poate fi considerat purtător al unui astfel de mesaj triumfător, anti-Arian. Neobișnuita scenă din S. Apollinare Nuovo (faza ariană a iconografiei) în care s-au ilustrat doi pești la Cina cea de Taină ar putea fi înțeleasă, chiar dacă într-o manieră rezervată, drept reprezentarea unei tradiții

³³ All photos are copyrighted by the author, with the exception of Fig. 2, which was reproduced from <http://commons.wikimedia.org> (not copyrighted).

* Thanks are due to Iuliana Gavril and Dorin Garofeanu for reading drafts of my text and for offering helpful comments and suggestions.

liturgice/religioase specifice arianismului goților. Motivul celor Trei Magi, prezent în bazilicile S. Vitale (iconografie ortodoxă) și S. Apollinare Nuovo (faza ortodoxă a iconografiei) a intenționat, în principal, să acorde statutul de noi Magi (îchinători) pentru împăratul Justinian și împărăteasa Teodora. Nu este însă exclus ca cei Trei Magi să fi fost ilustrați și pentru a transmite un mesaj anti-arian (ca o mărturisire a Trinității) și chiar anti-monofizit (ca o afirmare a umanității reale a Domnului Iisus Hristos).

Studiul este însoțit de fotografii ale scenelor iconografice luate în discuție.

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TUDII EOLOGICE

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CUPRINS

Prolog	5
---------------------	---

Studii

Lucreția VASILESCU

<i>Marian Icons in Orthodox Worship on Romanian Land</i>	7
--	---

Mihail MIHALCU, Mihaela LEONIDA

<i>Iconography in the Late Romanian Middle Ages: Granulometry Issues</i>	37
--	----

Mihaela PALADE

<i>Cărămida în arhitectura sacră bizantină — între material de construcție și element estetic</i>	57
---	----

Pr. Ilie MELNICIUC-PUICĂ

<i>Abrevieri din manuscrisele biblice regăsite în iconografie</i>	111
---	-----

Monahia Atanasia VĂETIȘI

<i>„Și refăcând chipul în vrednicia cea dintâi, l-a unit cu dumnezeiasca frumusețe...” Note despre icoana bizantină și imaginea religioasă occidentală</i>	139
--	-----

Ierom. Mihail GHEAȚĂU

<i>Estetică și limbaj în iconografie</i>	159
--	-----

Dragoș MÎRȘANU

Further Notes on the Aesthetic 'Shadow' of Gothic Arianism in Ravenna 199**Din Sfinții Părinți ai Bisericii**

Sfântul FOTIE, Patriarhul Constantinopolului

Omilia a X-a (trad. Oana COMAN) 213**Dialog teologic**

Mihai C. COMAN

Funcționalitatea icoanei 229**Din Teologia Ortodoxă contemporană**

Demetrios D. TRIANTAFYLLOPOULOS

Pictura bisericească și isihasmul. Dilema între înnoirea în Hristos și «renașterile» umaniste în perioada otomană. Renașterea Iconografiei Bizantine în arta postbizantină și neogreacă (trad. Adrian IVAN) 249**Cronica** 283**Recenzii***Corina POPA, Ioana IANCOVESCU, Hurezi, Ed. Simetria, București, 2009, 294 p.* (Mihaela PALADE) 323*Arhim. Sofian BOGHIU, Sfântul Antim Ivireanul și Mănăstirea Tuturor Sfinților, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2005, 173 p.* (Alexandru MIHĂILĂ) 327*Georgios KORDIS, Ritmul în pictura bizantină, trad. Mihai Coman, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2008, 147 p.* (Alexandru MIHĂILĂ) 330*Jan NICOLAE, Ioana RUSTOIU, Ana DUMITRAN, Crucea în patrimoniul spiritual al județului Alba, Ed. Altip, Alba Iulia, 2010, 226 p.* (Cristian ANTONESCU) 333**Cărți și reviste primite la redacție** 339